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**Testimony in favor of HB 4124
House Committee on Rules
February 4, 2020**

Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to submit this statement in support of House Bill 4124. I encourage the Committee to move this legislation forward as part of the 2020 session.

From March of 2015 until January of 2017 I served as Oregon's Secretary of State. During my tenure I chaired the Task Force on Campaign Finance Reform. The group worked hard over many months to evaluate strategies to address widespread concerns about money in politics and to examine the viability of various options for change. I strongly encourage this Committee and any subsequent task force to review the work that has already been done and to build on the findings and recommendations in its two reports.

Importantly, the Legislature has already moved forward on the most significant majority recommendation of the earlier Task Force: placing a constitutional amendment on the ballot so that Oregonians can take effective action to regulate campaign contributions and expenditures. In addition, significant negotiations over a campaign finance regulation plan were undertaken last session but not completed. Now we need a structured entity that can put the pieces in place for legislative consideration.

In addition, we need a timeline that will allow for the many facets of this effort to be understood, explained and tested so that the package brought to the legislature represents the best thinking possible of how to conduct free and fair campaigns,

- giving candidates the ability to make their case to voters,
- protecting the public's right to freely participate in campaigns of their choice,
- while working to restrain the overwhelming power advantage that "easy money" can create for one candidate over another.

Understanding the dynamics of a regulatory structure will take time and thoughtfulness.

If the Legislature does nothing, the possibility exists that a reform effort written in 2006 will go into effect. That would be a mistake. When Ballot Measure 47 passed 14 years ago, the campaign finance world was very different. Citizens United had not yet closed the door on regulating independent campaigns by corporate entities. Now, unlike in 2006, the voices of candidates can be overwhelmed by outside voices. This can and make low individual contribution limits meaningless and even counterproductive. Moreover, the tight limits on contributions and spending do not reflect the fact that the costs of campaign activities from printing, to mailing, to radio and TV advertising have risen since 2006. They may effectively stifle the ability of candidates to make their voices heard by the electorate.

I understand that critics will say it has taken too long for us to wrestle this problem to the ground and may sigh: “another Task Force”. The clock is indeed ticking on the public’s patience around campaign finance reform. But we are now so much closer to gaining agreement and understanding to develop a good product. It would be a mistake to let this session go by without committing to the final steps that are needed to get the job done.

I thank you for your attention to my testimony.

Jeanne Atkins
Former Secretary of State